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ABSTRACT

The study reported in this document was undertaken to determine the effects of Black Studies on Afro-American five-year-old preschool children, especially the changes which might occur in Afro-American pupils' self-concepts after exposure to Black Studies. In addition, this study sought to measure readiness gain in relation to improved self-concept. Implementation of the Black Curriculum followed pre-testing of 78 kindergarten children in a Baton Rouge, Louisiana, public school. The units of the four month long curriculum were: (1) the continent of Africa; (2) language experience/black media; (3) the aesthetic curricula and black arts; and (4) music. The experimental teachers integrated the Black Studies program into the total kindergarten curriculum and made classroom observations during the entire period. At the end of the investigation, post-tests were administered to the subjects. Results indicate that the Black Studies program was effective in increasing the self-concepts of Afro-American children and in improving academic readiness. Mean pre-test and post-test self-concept and readiness scores for males and females indicated the sex effect was non-significant. (Author/EB)

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THE EFFECTS OF BLACK STUDIES ON THE SELF-CONCEPT OF AFRO-AMERICAN CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

There is a significant relationship that exists between the perception of a particular race's role in history and the formation of self-concept and aspiration levels of the race's young. Perception of a racial role, in this sense, is how a particular race views itself in relation to other peoples, as well as to past and present civilizations, in terms of its racial contribution to the history of mankind. This perception, whatever it may be for various groups, and the resulting self-concept, is especially important in the development of attitudes associated with racism.

For instance, racism is an irrational, unsupportable belief in the inferiority or superiority of any given group purely on the basis of physical racial difference or assumed difference. For this investigation, the researcher was primarily interested in the negative effects of white racism on the self-concept of Black children. White racism is the excessive belief in the superiority of whites and the concommitant inferiority of Blacks perpetrated by whites and by their institutions.

A racial attitude stemming from such an irrational belief can cause both Blacks and whites to view the Negro race in a demeaning sense, especially as far as cultural and racial contributions to society and mankind are concerned. Even though the focus of this investi-

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gation was on Black children, they cannot be studied in isolation from the white children who are their peers. When Blacks are discussed, by implication, whites are also discussed.

In recent decades, a growing body of sociological, psychological, and anthropological research has documented the devastating effects of white racism on minority groups, adults as well as children. Research has clearly documented the negative and confused racial attitudes frequently expressed by Black children (Clark and Clark, 1950).[1] The Clarks note that "It is clear that the Negro child by age five is aware of the fact that to be colored in American society is a mark of inferior status." In a study conducted by Morland[2] (1962), the Clark findings were basically substantiated.

Banks[3] (1970), in a review of literature on the teaching of the Black experience, indicates that Black children not only tend to express negative self-evaluation and racial attitudes toward themselves, but they often express hostility toward whites. Research further suggests that white children come to school with negative racial attitudes already established, even as early as kindergarten. After investigating the racial attitudes of children in kindergarten and first and second grades,

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[1]Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie P. Clark, "Emotional Factors in Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children," Journal of Negro Education, XIX (Spring 1950), 341-350.

[2]Kenneth J. Morland, "Racial Acceptance and Preference of Nursery School Children in a Southern City," Merrill-Palmer Quarterly of Behavior and Development, VIII (October 1962), 271-280.

[3]James A. Banks, Teaching The Black Experience Methods and Materials, (California: Fearson Publishers, 1970), pp. 3-17.

Trager and Yarrow[4] (1952), noted that their subjects frequently expressed open hostility toward Blacks.

Starting at the most impressionable years for children in elementary school, racism gains mementum and magnitude as the child progresses through school.

One of the basic remedies posited for offsetting and possibly eliminating the negative effects of racism in this society is to use the school experience to inform young people about the contributions of all races.

The major purpose of this investigation was to study the effects of Black Studies on Afro-American five-year old preschool children, especially to identify changes which might occur in Afro-American pupils' self-concepts after exposure to Black Studies. In addition, this study sought to measure readiness gain in relation to improved self-concept.

The investigation addressed itself to four basic questions:
Could a program of Black Studies be taught effectively to young children? Would Black children develop a more positive self-concept as a result of being exposed to this program? Would Black children improve in school readiness as a result of being exposed to this program? Would a positive relationship exist between readiness gains and self-concept gains of the children?

This investigation was important for one main reason. It was an attempt to validate the hypothetical statements of Cuban and Kvaraceus[5],

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[4]Helen G. Trager and Marion K. Yarrow, They Learn What They Live, (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), pp. 135-150.

[5]William Kvaraceus, F. K. Paterson, B. T. Seasholes, and J. D. Grambs, Negro Self-Concept: Implications for Schools and Citizenship, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), pp. 23-30.

et. al., (1965), who while feeling the need for Black Studies for enhancing the self-concept of Black children, were unable to substantiate their beliefs by actual research. This was one attempt at offering substantiating research on the value and need for Black Studies programs for elementary school children.

METHOD

Subjects

Ss were 78 Black kindergarten children attending the Ryan Elementary School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The three groups which consisted of 42 girls and 36 boys were evenly divided by classes. The Ss were of diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Instruments

A modified version of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (The Way I Feel About Myself) and the ABC Inventory to Determine Kindergarten and School Readiness were used. In addition, teacher-made tests were administered.

Piers and Harris Scale contains items of children's statements about what they like and dislike about themselves. The items are written as simple declarative sentences (e.g.), "I am a happy person,"), (e.g.), "I behave badly at home.").

The experimenter (E) administered the test to the children individually. Oral responses were given by the Ss.

The ABC Inventory developed by Adair and Blesch was an achievement test. In administering the test, the E also found it necessary to give instruction individually and orally to the Ss.

The teacher-made tests to determine how much content of the curriculum was comprehended by the Ss were diagnostic. Two tests were administered. The children's responses were in the form of oral expressions.

Procedure

Upon the initial visit to the school, the experimenter described the Black Curriculum to the principal and the three kindergarten teachers that volunteered to participate in the experiment. Next, letters were sent home to parents informing them about the program of Black Studies that their children would be experiencing in the classrooms. Later, a pre-service workshop was conducted with the teachers. Each teacher was given four curriculum units. During the four months of implementation, two more workshops were conducted.

Following the initial teacher's workshop, a pre-test of two instruments was administered to the children in all three classrooms.

Implementation of the Black Curriculum followed pre-testing. The units of the Black Curriculum which were used in the classroom were: The Continent of Africa; Language Experience--Black Media; the Aesthetic Curricula and Black Arts; and Music.

The African Unit contained information regarding the Continent of Africa, emphasizing geographic areas, climate, the people, their life style and African culture. The activities planned in the unit attempted to introduce children to the diversity and richness of African culture. Focus was upon helping Black children appreciate the basis for the difference between the life styles of Africans and their own.

The content of the Language Unit focused upon developing language skills, poetry, literature, and folklore through the Black experience.

Emphasis was on developing vocabulary relating to Black culture, skill in sound development, giving directions, storytelling, choral speaking, and creative dramatics. Literature was stressed in the unit, because this medium will enable children to gain language skills and promote a positive self-concept within some children.

The Music Unit consisted of Black music, and Black musicians, along with their musical activities, and instruments. This was an attempt to help children learn to identify musical instruments, participate in musical activities, and make the children aware of the wealth of their heritage. A study of the significance of songs, lyrics, and rhythm patterns was also included. The music activities were related to the children's daily activities and were exemplified in work songs and folk songs.

Included in the Poetry Unit were many elements of poetry, such as sound devices, emotions, feelings, and the story content. An attempt was made to provide experiences in imagination and emotions which would serve as a stimulus for creative writing and expression.

These units were given to each teacher by the experimenter prior to the implementation of the curriculum. Along with these units, the teachers were given "Eyewitness: The Negro in American History" by William Katz; "Intergroup Relations for the Classroom Teacher"; and "Racism in America and How to Combat It."

The experimental teachers to a great extent integrated the Black Studies program into the total kindergarten curriculum.

Classroom observations were made by the experimenter during the entire period of the investigation. Also, conferences were held individually and collectively with the teachers each week. The teachers filled

out daily log sheets which assisted in assessing the units. These log sheets contained both descriptive and judgmental statements about the content, organization, and implementation of the curriculum within individual classrooms.

At the end of the investigation, post-tests were administered to the Ss. Data from all tests were later analyzed.

Results

The results of this investigation indicated that Black Studies were effective in increasing the self-concepts of Afro-American children and in improving academic readiness. It was demonstrated that the school can be an effective agent for improving self-concepts of minority children in America.

An analysis of the data indicated affirmative answers to the four basic research questions posited in the study. The students increased their knowledge of the material presented in the Black Studies curriculum. The scores obtained on the knowledge tests indicated that young Black children were able to assimilate, relate to, and reiterate the many facets of individual study units as reflected in the Knowledge Test.

The finding for the second question indicated that there was a gain in the children's self-concept over the school year as noted on the modified version of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. Significant self-concept gain at the .05 level between the pre- and post-test were observed for the children in the group. The findings suggest that the curriculum to which these children were exposed can make a difference in the way they view themselves. The fact that the self-concept in this group improved

significantly after a study of Black heritage tends to indicate there is a necessary cultural framework form which children can develop positive self-esteem.

The results from testing the third question, using the ABC Inventory, indicated there was a significant gain in the children's achievement over a four-month period. Significant achievement gain at the .01 level between pre- and post-test was recorded for the group. (See Table I.) The Ss did improve in school readiness and self-concept.

The results from testing the fourth research question indicated that there is a low but positive relationship between self-concept gain and achievement gain. The expectedly high negative correlations between initial pre-test score gain for self-concept and readiness indicate that the children who did best on the pre-test made the least gains. This is largely due to the ceiling effect of the post-test which restricted increase in scores.

The results from the mean pre-test and post-test self-concept and readiness scores for males and females indicated the sex effect was non-significant. The principal educational importance in the analysis was the significant pre-test-to-post-test in self-concept gain obtained by the children. This was stable for all three classes and both male and female.

Discussion

It is evident that Afro-American children can learn about the Black's heritage and his contributions to America before first grade. The data indicated a significant relationship between self-concept gain and readiness gain. Whereas only 47% of these children could be prejudged to be

in the likely to succeed in school catagory at the beginning of the school year, 97% scored that well at the conclusion of the treatment period of four regular school months.

Thus, this study supports prior research which has shown a significant correlation between positive self-concept and school success.

The fact that self-concept and readiness gain of young Black children were seen to increase by exposure to this program supports the previous research which indicates such a link existed. If one can positively affect the self-concept of young Blacks and show them the major contributions and potentiality of their race to mankind, one can also aid in erasing much of the preschool or early-school difficulties teachers have experienced in reaching minority group children. The challenge of attracting the imaginations of young Black children, or any child for the matter, and holding their attention, is of interest to all early education teachers. Black Studies meets this challenge while also conveying substantive pride-inducing information for young Black children.

This study was one opportunity to bring the Black experience into the minds and hearts of young children and to offset a multitude of previous misinformation. It was also an opportunity to show teachers how well young children respond to information which concerns the potential racial destiny of a society, and how the school can perform a vital role in assuring positive racial attitudes in all our young. Black Studies can affect the entire ethos of a school, especially in the relations of one race to another, making for a potentially truly open society.

TABLE I

MEAN GAIN FOR CLASSES A, B, AND C OVER A FOUR-MONTH PERIOD

Class	Gain	
	Chronological Age	Readiness Age
A	6 months	1 yr. 6 mo.
B	6 months	1 yr. 5 mo.
C	6 months	1 yr. 5 mo.

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